St. John's Lutheran Church
of Highland
311 Cumberland Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15237

Information as of
DECEMBER 2025

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Email - sjlutheran@verizon.net
phone - 412-364-1606

Saturday Worship:
5:30 p.m.

Sunday Morning Worship:
8:15 a.m. - *Traditional with Livestream*

Christian Education
9:30 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.

10:45 a.m. - *Contemporary with Livestream*

www.stjohnslutheranchurch.com

Pastor Kari Smail
Pastor Beth Clementson

DECEMBER 2025

ST. JOHN'S
LUTHERAN CHURCH OF HIGHLAND

Through God All Things Are Possible

"Making Christ Known"

DECEMBER 2025 EDITION

Current Church Council Members

President - Cemetery	Sam Sesti
Vice President - Mutual Ministry	Jody Removchik
Treasurer - Finance	Lloyd White
Secretary - Social Ministry	Emily Bovan
Senior Pastor	Pastor Smail
Associate Pastor	Pastor Clementson
Youth Ministry & Security	Jay Caulkins
Stewardship	Marcie Emory
Worship & Music	Matt McCormack
Preschool	Jody Removchik
Evangelism & Fellowship	Sandy Allen
Property	Marsha Logan
Staff Support	Matthew Galbraith
Technology	Bob David
Christian Education	Renee Gottschalk

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St. John's Current Staff

Senior Pastor	Kari Smail
Associate Pastor	Beth Clementson
Dir. of Contemporary Music	Ron Baling
Organist & Dir. of Choirs	Joseph Tuttle
Office Administrator Accounts Receivable Clerk	Mary Lynne Martin
Office Assistant	Andrea Miller
Accounts Payable Clerk	Rich Volpe
Chief Financial Officer	Laura Coombs
Dir. of St. John's Preschool	Jennifer Bolinda
Youth Ministry Coordinator	Anna-Marie Christian
Building Usage Coordinator	Mike Sheleheda
Custodian	George Tunney

St. John's Lutheran Church
"Making Christ Known"

Current Information as of December 2025
Vol. 6 Issue 12

A Note from Pastor Kari

The new church year is upon us! There is something about a fresh start, a new beginning. And, of course, with the start of Advent we look forward to Christmas when we remember the birth of a baby who starts His physical life on earth and the world is forever changed through His presence among us. We also remember at Christmas that Christ promised to come again and so we wait for His coming with eager anticipation, knowing that He will make all things new.

We all appreciate fresh starts because we are all human and make mistakes. One of the things that is helpful to be reminded of in those times is the significance of our baptism. We believe that our baptism is something that goes with us our whole lives. Each day because of baptism we drown to sin and rise again to new life. For this reason, each day we get a fresh start, a new beginning.

The daily fresh start we receive through our baptism is a reminder that there is grace for the journey for all of us through Christ who came at Christmas. Thanks be to God for the one who makes all things new!

Soli Deo Gloria!
(To God Alone be the Glory!)
Pastor Kari Smail

Worship Opportunities

Saturdays
5:30p.m. ~ Traditional Service

Sundays
8:15a.m. ~ Traditional service
9:30a.m. ~ Christian Education
10:45a.m. ~ Contemporary service
All Sunday services are now Livestreamed
www.stjohnslutheranchurch.com

~Communion~
We offer a hybrid style of receiving our Lord's Supper. Those attending services in person may choose to come up to the Altar to receive bread and wine, or remain in their seat and participate with our current no touch method. For those who are more comfortable still worshiping at home, consecrated cups are available for pickup in the vestibule at the main entrance of the church office area 9a.m. Friday – Sunday morning to be used while participating with the Sunday Livestream worship.

MIDWEEK ADVENT WORSHIP

You are invited to join us every Wednesday during Advent for our Midweek Gatherings.

We begin with dinner at 6:00pm in Highland Hall, followed by an Advent **study at 6:45 pm.** This year we are using a study by Amy-Jill Levine entitled, *"A Child Is Born"* It looks at the birth stories from the Old Testament and how they foreshadow the birth story of Jesus.

The evening concludes with a worship service of beautiful *Highland Vespers* by Nancy Galbraith at 7:30 pm in the sanctuary. We hope that you can join us for any or all of these gatherings as we prepare for Christ's coming!

Christmas Poinsettias

Our Altar Guild will be decorating the church with poinsettias for Christmas. Please consider sponsoring one or more plants to honor or memorialize loved ones.

The requested donation amount is $20 per potted plant. We will list the memorials and honorariums in our Christmas Eve service bulletins. You may take your sponsored plant home following our Lessons and Carols service on Sunday, December 28th at 9:30am. Please return this completed slip to the church office **by Sunday, Dec. 21st.**

Your Name: _____

In Loving Memory of: _____

_____

In Honor of: _____

_____

Amount Enclosed
$ _____

★ December 13, 2025 ★

National Wreaths Across America Day

Help St John's of Highland Lutheran Church Cemetery honor local heroes!

Sponsor a wreath today to be placed on a veteran's grave this December at St John's of Highland Lutheran Church Cemetery

Scan the QR code to make a donation online or visit www.wreathsacrossamerica.org/PASJHL

St. John's Lutheran Church of Highland

Christmas Eve Worship Services

3:30pm ~ Family Worship with Holy Communion and Children's Sermon

6:30pm *and* 9:00pm ~ Festive Candlelight Worship with Holy Communion

We will have <u>one service</u> the weekend of December 28th and 29th.

Please join us on Sunday, December 28th at 9:30am for

A Service of Lessons & Carols

The Church Office will be closed December 25th, 26th, and January 1st, 2026

~ Better Together ~ December: *Giving Gifts*

While Christmas reminds us that Jesus is the best gift ever, one of the blessings of the season is the opportunity to give others gifts. Many would argue that it is more fun to give gifts than to receive them, especially when we have put much thought into a gift or we know how much the person wanted whatever we are giving to them. These moments are a reflection of what we hear in 2 Corinthians 9:7 that *"God loves a cheerful giver."*

As we give to support the ministry of the church, "God loves a cheerful giver" as well. Our contributions make a difference in the lives of so many people. Children are baptized, they learn the story of faith through Sunday School and worship, they connect with the community as they participate in programming and help with our services, they are prepared for lifelong learning through our preschool. Adults have multiple ways to live out their faith in action through our many outreach projects to our neighbors in need, through our many musical ensembles and productions, through our various worship leadership opportunities, through our gatherings for midweek ministries. Seniors can come and exercise and have fun while staying young. All of these things are possible through the cheerful giving from our church family, and there is nothing like seeing the difference our giving makes! We are truly

"Better Together!"

Special Music

Greetings,

It's that time of year when we begin thinking about prelude music at the beginning of each Christmas Eve service. Whether or not you have shared your musical gifts at the Christmas Eve service before, we'd love for you to share them now. If you have a church-appropriate Christmas selection in mind, we welcome the opportunity for you to share it. If not, we are happy to assist in arranging and selecting something appropriate.

In general, we invite young musicians to the 3:30 service prelude and other folks to the other two services, but we are most interested in hearing your musical offerings, no matter which service's prelude works best for you. Please reach out to Erik Roth (erikjroth@gmail.com) or Joe Tuttle and let us know:

- ⇒ -at which service(s) you are interest and available to share your musical gifts (3:30, 6:30, 9:00)
- ⇒ -if you have a piece in mind, the name and composer/arranger of the piece
- ⇒ -if you need accompaniment, arrangement, or other accommodations

Yours in Christ, **Erik Roth**

Youth News

Dec. 14th R.I.S.E.
Christmas Celebration
Time: **6:30pm - 8:00pm**

Activity: We will have a Christmas Party with the option to bring a gift to fill a box with Toys for Youth in our area.

RSVP by Dec. 12th

Some Halloween Memories!

Some Ministry Highlights

PLEASANT VALLEY MEN'S SHELTER and BETHLEHEM WOMEN'S SHELTER

St. John's members, or organizations of our congregation, provide a meal to the clients of the shelters in our area on the 4th Wednesday evening of the month. Thank you to **Margie Miller** for providing November's Pleasant Valley Men's shelter meal and **Arlene Grejda** for preparing November's meal for the women at Bethlehem Haven.

In December, the **St. John's Chancel Choir** will cook for the men at Pleasant Valley and **Dan Ward and family** will prepare the meals for the women at Bethlehem Haven.

If you'd like to be involved in either of these outreach Ministries please contact Emily Bovan (724) 757-7812 (Men's Shelter Meal) or Marjorie Mills (412)266-8210 (Women's Shelter Meal).

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

Our Social Ministry Committee would like to...

Would like to thank everyone for the record amount of food donations for the **Food drive!!** We were able to deliver **87 bags** filled with food items to Light of Life Ministries. The NSCM driver that picked up the food was very impressed saying this was the biggest donation he has picked up this fall. Additional donations were received after the pick up deadline, which we delivered to the North Hills Community Outreach food pantry.

A special thanks to **Donna Giustini** and **Sheila DeCosmo** for their help gathering everything together for the delivery driver. Everyone's generosity is sincerely appreciated and we are ***Blessed to be a Blessing*** in this ministry for our community!

In addition, we'd like to thank everyone who donated gifts to this year's **Christmas Toy Drive**! The donation bins were overflowing with thoughtful toys and gift items. These gifts help those who are struggling to provide a special and exciting Christmas morning for their children.

It is just one more way that we can share Jesus' love!

Women of the ELCA

St. John's WELCA group will meet and have their Christmas potluck supper on **Tuesday, December 16**, at **6:00 pm**.

Please bring a salad, entree or dessert to share. We will enjoy wonderful company and the Christmas participation story!

BLESSED BUNDLES ~ Diapers needed!!

For more than 3 years, St. John's members have supported the Blessed Bundles ministry which supplies disposable diapers and used children's clothing to those in need.

BB's leaders have told us that there is a much-increased need for diapers at this time. If you can help, please bring diapers in any size and/or baby wipes to the bin located near St. John's back entrance. They will also accept opened packages of diapers.

Thank you for your help!

2025 Operating Budget

2025 Operating Budget

YTD Income vs. Budget – October 2025

YTD Income Budgeted	$597,083.33
YTD Income Received	$583,049.33
Over (Under) Budgeted	**($ 14,034.00)**

YTD Expenses vs Budget – October 2025

YTD Expenses Budgeted	$597,083.33
YTD Expenses Incurred	$658,779.31
Over (Under) Budgeted	**$ 61,695.98**

YTD Income Received	$583,049.33
YTD Expenses Incurred	$658,779.31**
YTD Surplus (Deficit)	**($ 75,729.98)***

We accept credit payments for a variety of missions. **Scan the QR code,** indicate the amount you would like to donate then click the dropdown arrow and choose the specific fund you would like it directed to. If you have any questions, please contact the church office.

Please note: If you currently choose to have your monthly contribution automatically withdrawn from your checking account, this method of contributing does not replace the ACH-Auto Debit

**Includes $1,108 for computer and $20,248 parts and labor to control the zone heating, $1,120 new electrical outlets for drapes, $40,413 for classroom renovation and $5,156 purchased additional flooring for future projects for a total of $68,045 out of the surplus fund for 2025 and the $10,000 donation under World Mission for the SW Synod.*

FYI: The last day we can receive donations for the fiscal year 2025 is on December 31st. Donations receive after this date, will be applied to your 2026 individual contribution goals.

Some Stewardship Tips from our Stewardship Chairs

The last couple of months we have explored various ways to give, depending on your financial situation. Some ideas included:

1. Qualified Charitable Distributions (post age 70 ½ from an IRA). It's not taxable!!!
2. Donating appreciated stock (get a tax deduction and avoid capital gains tax)
3. Bunching contributions in the same year (double your contributions in one year to exceed the standard deduction for more tax benefit and skip contributions the following year)

As we wrap up the calendar year, there's still time for planning ways you can share your resources in support of the ministry at St. John's. Deadline for all qualified charitable contributions is year end. If you are planning on utilizing a qualified charitable distribution, donating appreciated stock, or bunching contributions, please make sure to give your advisor enough time to process your request. We will continue to educate on giving strategies, legacy planning, and making a difference in 2026. We are all "Blessed to be a blessing" this year and every year. Thank you for all the ways that you bless our congregation!

Activities

Having Fun Staying Young!

Come and join this fun group!

A Silver Sneakers sponsored exercise group that meets on **Mondays and Thursdays at 10:15a.m.** in Highland Hall. Having Fun Staying young is growing in numbers each week. Why don't you come and join us? This is a friendly group that comes to exercise and helps each other and we continue to have fun while trying to stay fit.

We meet at 9:30 for coffee and our class has men and women of all ability levels.

Epiphany Dinner For All Ages!

Saturday January 10, 2026 6:30 - 8:00 P.M.

Dinner will be served at 6:30pm with a program to follow our meal.

Menu: Ham, Potato Casserole, Vegetable, Applesauce, Rolls and Dessert

Please RSVP by Tuesday, January 6, 2026

Epiphany Dinner

Name: _____

# of adults: _____ # of children: _____

A Free Will offering will be collected to offset the cost of dinner

The St. John's Stampers

It's December and Christmas is only days away. Time for last minute fun with stamping crafts. St. John's Stampers will be getting together on **Saturday, December 13th** from **9am-noon**. (*hopefully those who are making cards for Christmas will have those done*) So we will be concentrating on gift tags, small boxes, treat holders, gift cards holders, etc.

All are welcome!

There is a $5/person to help cover the cost of materials and we ask that you bring your own double-sided adhesive or glue.

Partners in Ministry

North Hills Refugee Ministry

Due to the shift in federal priorities away from actively receiving refugee immigrants, the agencies that support them and this ministry - NHRM - who works with them, have received no new families or individuals for many months. In that time, however, the NHRM coalition has continued to support our Syrian family who arrived in June of 2024. Additionally, this ministry has continued to work with our partner agencies, such as Jewish Family and Community Services (JFCS), to support other refugee families, already here in this country, who were not initially involved with NHRM.

For example, JFCS asked us to enter into a mentorship role with a single mother from Nigeria. One of our team members has been working with her using ESL-type instruction to help her learn English. She also received some much-needed furniture that had been previously donated to NHRM. Elsewhere, the NHRM coalition has supported dozens of families referred to it by JFCS by providing monetary assistance on an ad hoc basis for rent, utilities, and moving expenses, as well as providing clothing items (especially as winter approaches) and furniture.

The North Hills Refugee Ministry continues to be supported through the Ethel L. Verney Trust Fund through Southwestern Synod of Pennsylvania grants. To date for this funding year (beginning in March) the mission has received $19,115.50. It has $1,839.04 remaining with a third installment of $9,557.75 expected to be received by the end of the year.

Please continue to pray for all those in need and for the least of us, who are our neighbors, who come this country seeking a better life for themselves and their families. At this moment we do not have need of further financial or furniture donations. If you would like information on how to become involved with this ministry as a volunteer please reach out to me at bobdavidpa@gmail.com.

Bob David, Administration Committee Representative
North Hills Refugee Ministry

COME AND BE!

Thanks to everyone who participated in the creation of streamers for our Come and Be… kick-off weekends in October. To recap, the Evangelism committee asked people to share a thought about St. John's: what word they'd use to complete the statement, "Come and Be…".

St. John's means so many different things to different people! We were both surprised and delighted by the number and variety of the responses we received. Over 100 streamers were created, and we have listed all of the words below.

We got more than one of each of the following responses:

Loved
Accepted
Yourself/You/Myself
Thankful/Grateful
Connected
Peaceful/Peace
Joyful (Joyous)
Friendship/Friends
Community
Blessed
Family
Involved
Faithful
Forgiven
Renewed/Made New
Together
Spiritually Fed
Fulfilled
Happy
Hopeful
Home
Truthful/Truth
Open/Openness
Believe/Be-lieve
Part of Things
Welcomed/Welcoming/Welcome

These words were written once:

Inspired
Belong
Satisfied
Charity
Meet Kindness
Support
Free
OK
Gracious
Appreciative
Helpful
Saved
Sent
Challenged
Cleansed
Serve
Reminded
Bemused
Engaged
Caring
Bop!
Musical
Spirit-Filled
Communion
Kind
Proud
Whole
Eternal
Known
Good News
Part of St. John's History

Look for more Come and Be activities in 2026, when we'll highlight and celebrate a different response each month. Thanks again to all who participated!

*Questions? Ask someone on your friendly **St. John's Evangelism committee**:*

Pastor Beth ***Debbie Beleski Brown*** ***Jennifer Mance*** ***Nancy Swanhart***
Wendy West Hickey ***Marilyn Whitten***